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ABSTRACT

This study compared Swedish and British child care policy, educational philosophy, and function and organization of preschools. The activities, language, and group patterns of 559 children in 73 full-time and 42 part-time preschools in Sweden were observed. Questionnaires assessed staff-child ratio, group size, staff working conditions, and demographics in preschools. in the British study, 120 children were observed in 3 types of preschools. Results indicated that adult-led and cognitive activities were more common in Swedish than in British preschools, and that gross motor play was more common in British than in Swedish preschools. Despite differences in staff-child ratio and group sizes, the frequency of dialogue between children and adults was similar in Swedish and British preschools. It is observed that unlike British preschools, Swedish preschools are an important part of the total family welfare system. At present, the function of British preschools is educational, in contrast to Swedish preschools where both child care and education are the goals. However, both countries' educational philosophies emphasizes play and self-initiated activity. It is concluded that national child care policy directly affects educational practices in preschools and indirectly affects children's learning and development. A list of 12 references is included. (BC)

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Paper presented to the 5th Early Childhood Convention, Dunedin, New Zealand, 8-12 September 1991.

COMPARISON BETWEEN SWEDISH AND BRITISH PRESCHOOLS OF CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES, LANGUAGE AND GROUP CONSTELLATION

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Aims of the study

The presented study is part of a large and comprehensive study of Swedish preschools made in 1984 by Kärrby. This study was modelled by an earlier study in Britain made by the Oxford Preschool Research Group and presented by K Sylva, C Roy and M Painter in the book Child Watching at Playgroup and Nursery School published in 1980. It is therefore possible to make comparisons between preschools in the two countries on overall as well as detailed level.

In the present study the intention is to compare and interprete the results from the two studies in relation to

1. Swedish and British child care policy

2. Educational traditions and philosophy

3. Differences in function and organization of the preschool

International comparisons throw light on variations in ideological and philosophical features of education that are not usually detectable in other studies. As both the Swedish and British samples include preschools with different forms and functions it is also possible to draw conclusions as to organizational factors.

In interpreting the results my main assumption is that there is a relationship between the educational environment of the preschool and political, ideological and structural frames including preschool provision. In accordance with the ecological theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (2) it is assumed that educational content and indirectly the development of the child is influenced by past and present social, political and cultural conditions. In building up a system of child care it is important to recognize the role of the preschool (including all kinds of child care facilities) in the total political and economic development in the country.

Preschools are an important part of the Swedish family social support system. Dating back to the 30th with Alva and Gunnar Myrdal as prominent figures, preschool education in Sweden is seen as an important part of the public welfare policies. In after-war Sweden provision of preschool places in the form of day care was a means to liberate women labour. In the 70th the equality of men and women was the main argument for the expansion of preschool places. In 1975 a law was passed that guarantied a preschool place for all 6 year olds and in 1985 a national educational program for preschools was accepted by the Parliament. A decision was taken by the Parliament in 1987 that preschool places should be available for all preschool children in need of a place. The political aim is to guarantee each child a preschool place whose parents want or need it. This is proposed to become a law.

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In contrast to Sweden, preschools in Britain are not seen as part of a family social program. Child care is the responsibility of health authorities and have no connection to preschools which are part of the educational system. During the last years public funding for full time day care has decreased. As stated by Jerome Bruner in 1980, (3) the promises of preschool places for all who wanted it, made in Mrs Thatcher´s 1972 White paper, Education: A Framework for Expansion, were not fulfilled. In the National Children´s Act presented in 1989 there is a strong support for preschools exclusively functioning as educational institutions. To save costs, many preschools are working on part time basis thus excluding the possibilities of full time work for the parents, usually the mother. Percentage of places for preschool children of working mothers in different form of child care in shown in table 1.

Table 1. Percentages of preschool age children with mothers working full or part time in different forms of child care in Sweden and Britain 1987

	At home	Relatives Private	Nurs (FTP)	Fam d.c.
Sweden				
Full & part time	14	9	42	36
Britain				
Full time	19	52	15	29
Part time	56	30	9	13

Source: P Moss (1991)
Note: When sums add to more than 100 more than one arrangement is included.

Provision and forms of preschools in Sweden and Britain

There are two main forms of Swedish preschools, full time (day care) and part time (formerly Kindergarten). Full time preschools (FTP) are available for children whose parents are both working or studying. Part time preschools (PTP) are available for all children between 4 and 6. About one third of all 6 year olds, about 20 % of the 5 year olds and only a few 4 year olds go to PTP. According to official policy the same educational content should characterize the two forms of preschool and be based on the Preschool Educational Program.

The expansion of public child care in Sweden has been rapid since 1965 as can be seen in table 2.

Table 2. Proportion of children 0-6 in public care in Sweden 1965-1990

	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990
Full time preschools	1.5	4	9	18	28	33
Family day care	1.5	4	6	13	17	19
Sum	3.0	8	15	31	45	51

The main organizational differences between the two forms of preschool are shown below

Full time preschool	1-6 (10) year old children	7-10 hours a day	Group size 12-18	2 preschool teachers 1 nurse
	Fee (200-2000 SEK a month)	Parents employed or study	Children with special needs	10-60% of 1-6 year olds attend
Part time preschool	Mostly 6 year olds or 4-6	3 hours a day	Group size 15-20	1 preschool teacher 1 nurse
	Free of charge	Parents at home or employed	Every child right to attend	98% of 6 year olds and some 4-5 years attend

Summary of the Swedish study

Individual observations of 5-6 year old children were made in 73 full time and 42 part time preschools. In each preschool observations were made during 20 continuous minutes during different times of the day of five randomly chosen children. The activities, language and group pattern were registered according to the system used in the Oxford Preschool Research Project. Altogether 559 children were observed in 19 municipalities on the west coast of Sweden. Half the preschools were situated in the city of Gothenburg and the other half in towns and villages.

Information about the organizational structure of the preschool such as staff/child ratio, group size, working conditions of the staff, the size of the preschools, the social character of the uptake area and fees were collected by a questionnaire.

The educational structure was studied by the registration every 15 minutes of the activities going on during two half days. The planning, direction and regularity of the activities were judges on a 3-graded scale. (These data are not presented in the present paper)

The study comprises about 22.000 minutes of preschool activities, language discourse and group constellations treated as dependent variables, and a number of frame factors treated as independent variables. The data have been analyzed statistically mainly by frequency comparisons, correlations and variance analysis methods.

Summary of the British study (here called the Sylva study)

The Sylva study (11) was made in three types of preschool, Nursery school (NS), Nursery class (NC) and Playgroup (PG). About the same number of each kind of preschool was represented in the study. They were situated in both cities and villages. In all, 120 randomly chosen children were observed in 19 preschools, about 6-7 in each preschool. Half of the children were 3.5-4.5 and the other half 4.5-5.5 years old. The British children were thus one or two years younger than the Swedish children.

Main results

One of the aims of the Swedish study was to compare FTP and PTP. Therefore, in all the comparisons the two forms of preschools were separated. In the Sylva study the three forms of preschools were separated in only some of the comparisons.

TABLE 3. Comparisons of results from the Swedish and British study. Distribution of percentages of different activities.

	SWEDEN			OXFORD
	Full time	Sign p<.05	Part time	
Large muscle movement	4.0	x	1.6	9.8
Large scale construction	1.9		2.2	0.9
Small scale construction	2.4		2.5	4.3
Art	7.7	x	11.5	8.3
Manipulation	3.6	x	6.2	12.0
Adult directed art and manipulation	3.4	x	6.0	0.6
Structured materials	3.9	x	5.7	4.5
Three R's activities	3.4		3.8	0.6
Games with rules	4.6		6.1	-
Music	1.2		0.9	0.3
Group activities	9.5		9.7	7.7
Problem solving	0.2		0.2	1.7
Examination	0.1		0.1	1.5
Pretend play	10.6		9.9	10.4
Scale version toys	2.6		3.4	2.3
Informal games	3.3	x	0.9	3.1
Spontaneously structured play	1.5		1.1	0.8
Organized play	2.1		1.3	0.1
Social interaction, non-play	10.0	x	4.6	7.0
Standing around	1.8		1.1	1.0
Cruising	1.2		1.3	2.0
Purposeful movement	5.1	x	5.8	3.0
Waiting	1.9		2.1	1.4
Watching	5.4	x	6.6	9.4
Domestic activity	7.5		4.9	7.1
Theme length (average)	1.45		1.38	

The overall pattern shows that there are great similarities between the British and the two forms of Swedish preschools. For example, the frequencies of pretend play and play with small version toys are almost the same. The sum of "passive" activities are also very similar.

Clear differences can also be found, however, such as in the frequencies of large muscle movement (gross motor play), manipulation and adult directed art activities.

Combinations of categories were made into the following groups of activities

Creative and manipulative (Construction, Art, Manip. Struc.mat. Mus.)
Fantasy (Pretend, scale version toys)
Adult led (Creative & Group activity)
Cognitive (3 R´s, Rule games, Probl. Ex.)
Social (Play and interaction)
Large muscle movement
"Passive"
Domestic

Comparisons are made in diagram 1

Diagram 1

British preschools are found to differ from the two forms of Swedish preschools mainly in three areas. Adult led and cognitive activities are more common in S preschools while gross motor play is more common in B preschools.

In some areas the B preschools are more like our PTP than FTP. This is particularly noticeable in the area of creative and manipulation activities where B preschools are more like PTP than FTP in which social interaction is more prevalent.

Large differences are found between the different forms of B preschools, Nursery schools (NS), Nursery class (NC) and Playgroup (PG), on separate activities indicating a great variation among the B preschools. Pretend play and manipulation are particularly common i NC. In NS the frequency of gross motor play is high while in PG adult led activities are common. (Table 3:b Appendix).

Group constellation
Being active in a group or alone is an important aspect of the socialization process. From table 4 and diagram 2 it is shown that there is a great variation between the three kinds of B preschools in group constellation. The large difference between S and B preschools in group activity is particularly interesting. Nearly one half of all activities in S preschools are carried out in small or big groups. In B preschools, activity carried out alone, in pairs or parallel are much more common. I will return to these facts later.

TABLE 4. Comparisons of social grouping between full time (FTP) and part time (PTP) Swedish preschools, Nursery school (NS), Nursery Class (NC) and Playgroup (PG). Percentages of total time

Group constellation	FTP	PTP	NS	NC	PG
Alone	9	11	19	16	13
Parallel and pair child-adult	27	28	38	27	33
Pair child-child	20	20	24	33	24
Large and small group	44	41	19	24	30
	100	100	100	100	100

Diagram 2

Language communication

In preschool research the quality of language communication and interaction between the child and the adult has been found to be the most important factors contributing to the competence of the child as found by e g Tizard et al (12), Clarke-Stewart et al (4) Phillips et al (9). In my own and Sylva´s studies a relatively crude measure was used, categorizing language interaction as dialogue vs monologue. Aspects of quality can be assumed to be connected to frequency of dialogue and frequency of total language communication. In table 5 the frequency of dialogue and monologue are shown separately for the different forms of preschool.

TABLE 5. Frequency of dialogues between child-adult and child-child in full time (FTP) and part time (PTP) Swedish preschools, Nursery school (NS), Nursery class (NC) and Playgroup (PG). Percentages of total time

	FTP	PTP	NS	NC	PG
Dialogue between					
child-grownup	7	6	9	7	6
child-child	14	12	9	21	10
No dialogue	79	82	82	72	84
	100	100	100	100	100

Surprisingly enough it was found that in spite of rather great differences in staff/child ratio and group sizes the frequencies of dialogue between child and adult was very similar in S and B preschools. Is there an in-built structure in preschool practise that reduces child-adult conversation to less than 10 % of the total time?

In my own study the No dialogue category includes child-adult monologue in FTP and PTP (16 and 13 %), child-child monologue (37 and 36 %) and silence (25 and 33 % $p < .05$).

Only about one fifth of the observed minutes contained language between the child and the adult according to the Swedish study. In more than twice as many observations there was some kind of contact between the child and the adult. The frequencies of contact, with or without language, are shown in table 6.

TABLE 6. Frequencies of contact between children and adults in full time (FTP) and part time (PTP) Swedish preschools, Nursery schools (NS), Nursery class (NC) and Playgroups (PG). Percentages of total time

	FTP	PTP	NS	NC	PG
Contact between					
child and adult	44	38	44	37	50

The figures indicate that the non-verbal communication varies to some extent between S and B preschools presumably due to differences in staff/child ratio.

In both the Swedish and the Sylva study analysis has been made as to which activity contain most child-adult communication. It appears that in both countries conversation was most common in non-play social interaction and domestic activity. This implicates that these situations, which are an important part of the socialization process, are particularly effective for the learning of social attitudes and values.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Swedish and British child care policy

There is a great variance among the B preschools which is not found in Sweden. In spite of the fact that FTP by tradition have a social and caring function and PTP an educational function, they are surprisingly similar as to educational content. During the last 20-30 years the organization of preschools in the municipalities has been regulated by the National Board of Social Health and Welfare. Rules and recommendations as to space per child, staff/child ratio, professional requirements of personnel, numbers and age combinations of children in a group has contributed to a homogeneous preschool situation. As shown by Kerstin Palmerus (a participant at this conference), family day care also has much in common with institutional preschool practise.

In spite of the differences between FTP and PTP in time extension, staff/child ratio and ages of the children, the activity pattern is very similar. The higher proportion of creative activity and the lower proportion of social and motor activity in PTP can be attributable to the shorter time. As the children are in PTP less than half the time compared to children in FTP, time is concentrated on more "educational" activities. In clock time, about one hour a day is used for structured activities in both kinds of preschool. Children in FTP are there about 7-9 hours a day which gives generous time for social interaction and personal attention to compensate absent parents.

A governmental report published by the National Commission on Child Care in 1972 (Barnstugeutredningen) has played a great role for organization and educational content of the preschools. It was followed by a number of publications on advise concerning educational practise that were used in the training of preschool teachers as well. This coincided in time with the tremendous expansion of preschool places mentioned earlier. Altogether, this central steering has contributed to a high homogeneity of preschools in Sweden as shown in international comparison by Andersson (1). His results show that children who start early in full time preschool are better adjusted to school and have better results than children who start preschool later or have other forms of child care.

As Swedish preschools are an important part of the total family welfare system, particularly the FTP are seen as necessary complements to family upbringing. The official goals of preschol education has an ideological stress to effectuate this. In the Educational Program for Preschools, the importance of the group is related to changes in society. Group experience is supposed to compensate the lack of siblings and give the child an opportunity to participate in a larger community than the family can provide. This is formulated in the following way:

"In being members of a preschool group and having the opportunity to grow up and develop together with a group of peers, children in the preschool might be socialized into feelings of responsibility and solidarity, and develop friendship and lasting relationships"

For this purpose great emphasis is put on the socialization process. This goal is clearly found to influence the practical work as shown in the high percentage of activity in small and big groups compared to the B preschools. Doing things together in cooperation is typical for our preschools in contrast to the B preschools where children more often do things by themselves, parallel or in pairs. The work in B preschools can be characterized as more task oriented than group oriented.

Educational philosophy

It is apperent that in both countries there is an emphasis on play and self initiated activity that can be seen in contrast to the school preparing function found in most other European countries and in the USA. Much of the B preschool philosophy is in agreement with the basic principles guiding preschool education in S as formulated in the Educational Program.

Activities should be linked to the children´s own experiences and developmental stage

Learning and development is occurring all the time, not only during structured learning situations

Playing is the child´s own concrete way of acting out and reflect upon experiences and impressions from the environment and the child should be given vast opportunities to play in the preschool setting.

The respect for the child´s own way of doing things and solve his/her own problems is in line with the thinking of Fröbel and later humanistic psychologists like Susan Isaacs in Britain who put these ideas into preschool practise.

However, our results indicate that there are great differences in emphasis on developmental vs socialization aspects. The high proportion av manipulative activities and gross motor play in B preschools seem to have a developmental goal in itself. The ages of the children may contribute to this, being younger than in the Swedish study.

Being members of a society and not only a family, the total social and intellectual development of the child are seen as primary goals for preschool education in S. The socialization process was particularly emphasised in the 70th. Transmission of values concerning common democratic goals was seen as a main goal in contrast to earlier emphasis on psychological development. The staff were seen as being important models indirectly imparting attitudes of responsibility for the group, cooperation and justice among the children. Mixed age groups was a means to foster these kinds of feelings.

Today this emphasis on the socialization process has diminished. Instead there is a return to more homogeneous age groups, usually 1-3 and 4-6. This is done in order to facilitate more goal oriented activity. There is also a return to more structure and planning of activities. These are often presented to the children as themes which penetrate different kinds of activities. This has led to an increasing demand for further education among the personnel. There is a renewal of ideological content and many preschools work out their own profile by putting stress on different content such as art work, ecology, drama, etc. In other preschools there is an increased stress on school preparation. Politically there is a change of rules as to public spenditure on parent cooperative preschools and other varieties of privately run preschools.

This development can be seen in relation to changing economic conditions.
A governmental proposition suggesting voluntary school start at the age of 6, accepted by the Parliament this year, has turned the attention to the school preparing function of the preschool. Particularly the 6 year olds are nowadays introduced into work with letters and figures during structured conditions for about 1-3 hours a week. A departmental commission is working on a new school curriculum covering also the preschool ages. Today, the problems of transmission from preschool to school at either 6 or 7, depending on parent decision, is a main concern for teachers and administrators on both school and preschool level.

Function and organization of preschools

In B there is a large variety of preschools. Prof Pascal at Worcester univ. told me that in a recent study in Britain, 21 different varieties of preschools were included. Most of these do not offer full time care. Their functions are to be educational in contrast to S preschools where both care **and** education are the goals. A new term is however being introduced in B preschool research, **educare.**

In my own study I found that "educare" is closely connected to the time dimension. In spite of the fact that PTP have the same educational content as FTP it was found that PTP had a more school like structure. This appeared in the higher proportion of silence and watching in PTP, particularly among the girls. In a separate analysis of gender differences, the same gender pattern was found as in school, that is, boys talked more and got more attention from the teacher than girls. This was not found in FTP where instead the girls had more contact with the adults while boys to a great extent played together in big groups. The FTP thus offer an environment that enhances the girls´identification with the adults. As most of the staff are women this leads to better conditions for sex role identification among the girls than the boys. who instead seem to prefer male peers as identification objects.

Can S and B preschools be compared as to qualitative aspects?
No such intentions are made in the present study. However, there is an interesting longitudinal study by Osborn and Milbank (7) that relates kind of preschool attendance to school achievement at the age of 10. The study comprises over 13.000 children. In this is was found that preschool form is clearly related to school achievement Surprisingly enough, children who had attended Nursery class had the lowest averages on tests of reading and mathematics at the age of ten compared to children who had attended NS and PG. The results are astonishing in relation to the fact that NC are connected to primary schools. Children in NC spend about one third of their time in manipulative tasks and another third in pretend play but less time in adult led activity which is a much higher proportion than in both S preschools, NS and PG. Spending too much time on tasks that has as their goal to improve fine motor coordination done without adult interaction, combined with much pretend play, is found to have detrimental effects on later school achievement.

Organizational factors

How much of the variance between the two studies are due to organizational factors like staff/child ratio, group size and age composition, etc?

In the S study relationships between these and the child observations were done. From these results as well as from results from studies done in GB and the USA, inferential conclusions are drawn to explain differences between the S and B preschools.

Staff/child ratio
Staff/child ratio is found to have weak relationships to educational content. Instead the amount of communication and child-adult contact are found to be related to number of adults per child (Kärrby, Roupp et al). In our study the percentage of child-adult dialogues do not vary very much. Staff/child ratio thus doesn´t seem to influence this kind of measure. On the other hand, the high percentage of dialogues between children in NC may be attributable to a low staff/child ratio as well as group size.

Group size
Group size is found to be related to group interaction and communication. This was found in the S study, in larger groups there was more social play, a finding supported by Smith and Connolly in GB (10) and the Sylva study where more social play was found in larger centers (11). On the contrary in the S study social interaction was proportionally much more common in FTP where the groups are small and the staff/child ratio is high. In PG with small groups and many adults there is a clear relationship to higher frequency of contact between children and adults. Group size is therefore not judged to be related to the differences found between S and B preschools in any systematic way.

Age

How much do differences in age of the children and age mixture in the groups explain our results? Data from the Sylva study indicates that the frequency of manipulation and to some extent gross motor play was higher among the younger children. As manipulation is combined with "creative" activities in the S study the comparisons still seem to be relevant.

Organizational factors are judged to play a minor role as explanation of the differences in the present study.

Summing up

My main conclusion is that national child care policy has explanational value for educational practice in preschool and indirectly for children´s learning and development. Preschool provision organized within a family support system has a function in relation to the whole family and includes the child as a part of a total environment. Preschool education is seen as a socialization process in which care and education have equal value. In Sweden, the child care system has grown out of a national interest to provide preschool children for all who need. As 80-90 % of both parents work outside of the family there is a high need for preschool places which draws a cost of the size corresponding to that of agriculture (2 % of the GNP).

Along with this aim there has been a central steering from the National Board of Health and Welfare that has created a homogeneous preschool situation and probably has contributed to a high quality on the average. A new policy from the Board is on the way, however. Their mission today is to turn over the decisions of rules and regulation to the local political boards. The task of the National Board toady is to follow up and evaluate what is happening on local level. Research and developmental work is important and a particular budget is allocated for this purpose. My intension in the present study has been to try to show that there is a relationship between what goes on at the central political level and what happens to the individual child in a preschool setting.

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TABLE 3: b.

Frequencies of different activities in Nursery school (NS), Nursery Class (NC) and Playgroup (PG) (Percent).

	NS	NC	PG
Gross motor play	31	15	20
Art & Manipulation	20	35	23
Structured material	5	3	3
Pretend play	15	31	21
Adult led group	14	10	26
3 R's & Probl. solv.	5	1	3
"Passive"	7	5	4
	97	100	100

Revised data from Sylva p 123

Diagram 1: Comparisons of frequencies of different activities in Swedish and British preschools (percent)

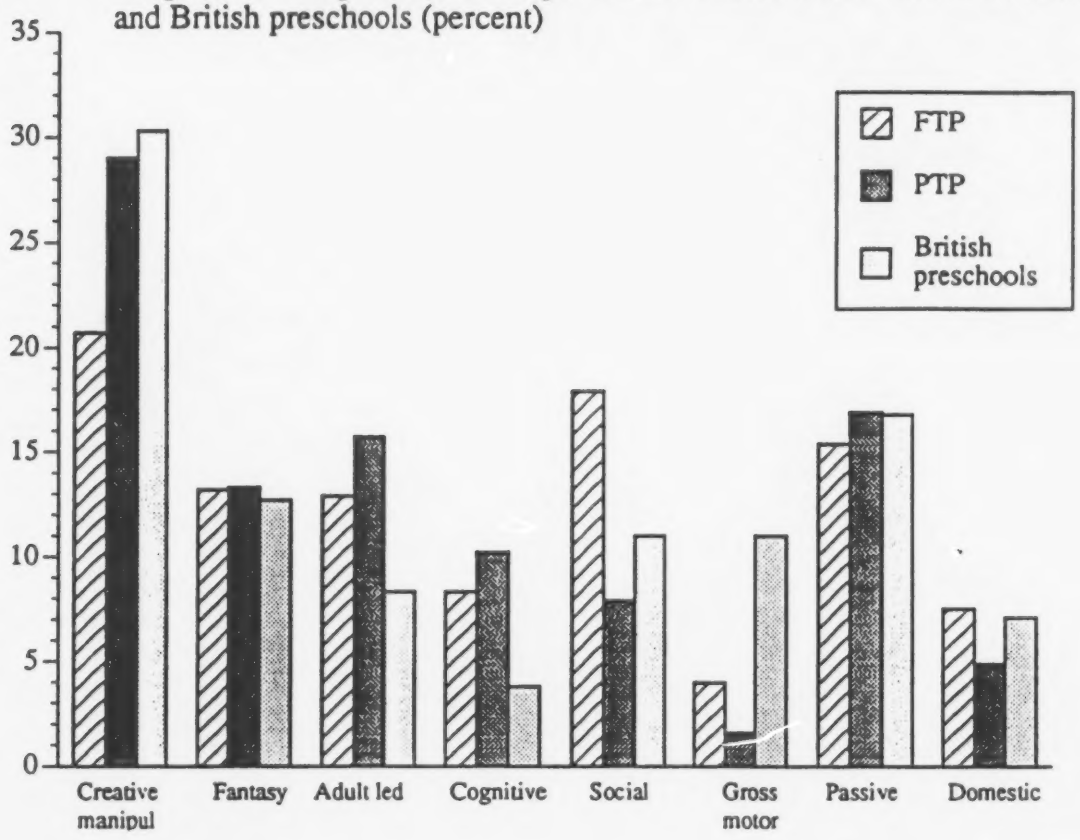

Diagram 2: Comparisons of group constellation and contact between child and adult in Swedish and British preschools (percent)